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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 001201

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

Please note: no Tel Aviv Media Reaction report on Tuesday, April 24, 2007, Israel's Independence Day holiday.

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Israel's 59th Independence Day
 - [1](#)2. Mideast
 - [1](#)3. Sudan: Darfur
-

Key stories in the media:

Over the weekend all media prominently and extensively covered, and commented on, events related to Israel's Memorial Day and Independence Day. Leading media cited data released by the GOI's Central Bureau of Statistics, according to which Israel's population increased by 121,000, or 1.8 percent, since last Independence Day. Israel's 5,415,000 Jews and 310,000 "others" -- mostly non-Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union or those whose Jewish status is undetermined -- make up 76 percent of Israel's population. The Arab and Druze population numbers 1,425,000, or 20 percent of Israel's citizens.

Ha'aretz reported that PM Ehud Olmert's associates have asked Kadima Knesset members to prepare a media blitz to counter the onslaught expected upon publication next week of the interim report of the Winograd Commission probing the Second Lebanon War. Ha'aretz said that Olmert's aides want to turn public opinion in his favor in the event of an expected chorus of calls from politicians, non-government organizations and bereaved parents for his resignation. The campaign team will emphasize the "collective responsibility" of the cabinet and Knesset, as well as public support for the decision to launch the second Lebanon War. Ha'aretz wrote that Olmert knows he cannot rely on the support of Kadima ministers, especially FM Tzipi Livni, Finance Minister Hirschson, and Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz, who was defense minister during the years preceding the war. Ha'aretz said that, despite their fears, the PM's associates assume that while the interim report is expected to criticize Olmert and his ministers, it will not be "fatal," and will leave him with political and public maneuvering room. Yediot reported that members of the Winograd Commission wrote in its interim report that that Defense Minister Amir Peretz was "captive" to the army. On Sunday Ha'aretz said that the report will criticize the cabinet and IDF's pre-war conduct. All media quoted IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi as saying at last night's official ceremony in Jerusalem marking the start of Memorial Day that the IDF is doing what it can to rectify the problems it encountered in the Second Lebanon War.

Leading media reported on, and Yediot bannered a comment made by Hizbullah Deputy Secretary-General Naim Qassem on Sunday that serious negotiations are taking place with Israel over the release of abducted IDF soldiers Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev. Qassem was quoted as saying that they would be freed only in exchange for the release of all Lebanese detained in Israel, including the terrorist Samir Kuntar, who murdered a family in Nahariya in 1979.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that a high-ranking Israeli defense official told the newspaper that if hundreds of terrorists are released in exchange for abducted IDF Cpl. Gilad Shalit, they will pose an immediate threat to Israeli cities and settlements.

On Sunday Ha'aretz wrote that the gist of the Israeli message in its recent talks with Defense Secretary Robert Gates is that Syria is preparing for a military confrontation with Israel. Ha'aretz said that the US message to Israel on Syria -- Israel should avoid diplomatic talks with that country -- is unchanged.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that Israel has rejected the surprise offer by Pakistan's President Gen. Pervez Musharraf to help resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

All media reported on Sunday's first round of French presidential elections. Yediot wrote that an overwhelming majority of French expats in Israel -- 83 percent -- voted for conservative candidate Nicolas Sarkozy, 9 percent for Socialist Segolene Royal, 5 percent for centrist Francois Bayrou, and 1 percent for far-Right Jean-Marie Le Pen. Only 9,000 of 43,000 registered voters took part in the ballot.

Maariv reported that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice might meet with Iranian FM Manouchehr Mottaki during next month's Iraq conference.

On Sunday Yediot reported that on Sunday, for the first time since the Second Lebanon War, the US administration announced a new arms deal with Israel. A request was issued by the Pentagon to the

Congress asking for approval to sell to Israel 3,500 MK-84 bombs. Israel asked for those bombs in addition to spare parts and technological assistance. The deal is valued at USD 65 million for the bombs only and USD 78 million with the spare parts and the assistance. Yediot quoted Pentagon sources as saying that it was an American interest to have Israel retain its military superiority. However, Yediot said that the deal is also likely to have been signed in order to allay Israeli concerns after Israel recently asked the Americans to cancel an arms deal with Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is supposed to be sold sophisticated weaponry, and officials in Jerusalem voiced their concern over such a development. Yediot wrote that the US administration decided to approve the arms deal with Saudi Arabia but, in tandem, to settle an arms deal with Israel as well.

PM Olmert was quoted as saying in an interview with Israel Radio on Sunday that "Iran is far from crossing the nuclear threshold."

Leading media reported that the IDF rescinded its permit for a march by right-wingers to the destroyed northern West Bank settlement of Homesh.

Leading media reported that Hamas has included the abduction of IDF soldiers in its official policy.

Hatzofe reported that on Sunday the Jordanian Royal Court published a clarification denying that King Abdullah II called for compensating Palestinian refugees instead of returning them to their homes, and that he said that Jordan and Israel had "common enemies."

Hatzofe said that the refutation followed a report by Ha'aretz on Friday, which allegedly cited remarks made by the King during a meeting with Knesset Speaker Dalia Itzik in Amman last week.

All media reported that on Sunday Knesset Member Azmi Bishara submitted his resignation from the Knesset at Israel's Embassy in Cairo yesterday. He was quoted as saying in an interview with Al Jazeera-TV that stated he decided to waive his immunity due to the "chorus of incitement" against him. Bishara vowed to return to Israel but he does not know when. "I am a son of Palestine and a son of Greater Syria. Exile is not an option for me and my return is certain," he was quoted as saying. Maariv quoted Olmert associates as saying that it would be preferable if Bishara did not return to Israel.

Leading media reported that on Saturday Gazans fired four Qassam rockets; one scored a direct hit on a home, sending several people into shock, on a day in which security forces killed six Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

On Sunday Maariv reported that Knesset Speaker Dalia Itzik decided on Saturday to cancel the planned trip to an international parliamentarians' conference in Bali next month by Knesset members since the Indonesian authorities would not agree to the Shin Bet's security conditions.

Over the weekend media reported that on Saturday morning masked gunmen blew up large parts of the American International School in the Gaza Strip after stealing equipment and furniture.

Over the weekend Yediot and The Jerusalem Post reported that the Defense Ministry refuses to build a memorial to fallen soldiers in the West Bank.

Ha'aretz presented a declassified secret study conducted by the Institute for Defense Analyses in Washington, according to which, using the now defunct Strike Command (STRICOM), the US intended to attack Egypt or Israel -- depending on which would open hostilities -- during the Six-Day War to forestall unwanted developments. Ha'aretz wrote that the planning of operations against the IDF remains in the defense apparatus as a persistent relic of a declared American policy that seeks to achieve a "holy balance" in the Israeli-Arab conflict, and that its origins go back to the 1950s.

The media reported that the Knesset's House Committee extended the temporary incapacity of Israeli President Moshe Katsav until the end of his tenure on May 15.

Leading media reported that on Sunday the police questioned

Strategic Affairs Minister Avigdor Lieberman over suspicions of bribing and money-laundering.

On Sunday Yediot reported that an affair involving the biomedical startup Lifewave is becoming more complicated. In addition to the (Israeli) Securities Authority's investigation of allegations of driving up share prices, it turns out that two of the interest holders in the company, Mordechai Kugel and Shaike Scheinberger, were wanted by the FBI after a serious indictment was served against them in the United States. This was not mentioned in Lifewave's prospectus before its shares were issued on the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange in December 2006. An official of the authority was quoted as saying on Saturday that the company was obligated to report such a case.

All media reported that on Sunday Finance Minister Abraham Hirschson suspended himself for three months so he can fight embezzlement allegations. Similar to other media, Ha'aretz quoted sources close to PM Ehud Olmert as saying on Sunday that Olmert intends to serve as acting finance minister for a period of at least several weeks. Leading media reported that on Sunday Bank of Israel Governor Stanley Fischer lowered the basic interest rate by 0.25 percent -- to 3.75 percent.

Over the weekend leading news web site Ynet and Channel 2-TV prominently mentioned the presence of an American Embassy representative at the Raanana funeral of Prof. Liviu Librescu, who was killed in the Virginia Tech massacre. The media also noted that Romanian diplomats attended the ceremony.

Hatzofe bannered the results of a survey commissioned by the Emek Yizreel College (in northern Israel) and carried out by the Teleseker Polling institute, according to which 60 percent are totally dissatisfied with Israel's leadership, and another 29 percent are only slightly happy with it. The poll found that 26 percent of the respondents were considering emigrating over the past year.

1. Israel's 59th Independence Day:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "[Israel must] finally [find] a way to live in peace with its neighbors, so that it may fulfill its Zionist destiny."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "This country must not measure itself solely by its leadership. Ultimately, it is the strength of the people and what we have achieved here that is enduring, and will prevail."

Block Quotes:

1. "Fulfilling Our Zionist Destiny"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (4/23): "An atmosphere of disappointment, despondency and anxiety prevails in Israel in its 59th year. There is no point in trying to dull the power of these feeling when we mark Memorial Day and Independence Day. A new government, headed by a new political movement that undertook to end the occupation, has led -- or more accurately, was led -- by an arrogant, rusty army to a painful, frustrating and dangerous defeat in a war against Hizbullah.... While Israel, with its foolish policy throughout 40 years of occupation, managed to crack and split Jewish solidarity, the burning hatred toward the country is now increasing the general Jewish solidarity and sense of mutual responsibility. This is not blind support for the State of Israel and its government. The days of blind support are long over, and just as well.... Most [Israelis], both those living in Israel and abroad, are yearning for a day in which the two-state solution is implemented. The Jews' solidarity, support, investments, immigration -- and their dependence on us and our dependence on them -- merely increase Israelis' historic responsibility to ensure that

their country finally finds a way to live in peace with its neighbors, so that it may fulfill its Zionist destiny."

II. "Israel at 59"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (4/23): "Our leadership crisis is made worse by the fact that it does not come at a time of international stability, but of intensifying threat. Hamas, Hizbullah and perhaps even Syria are, according to security officials, preparing for the next war, while Iran is racing to achieve nuclear weapon capability. Despite all this, it is neither healthy nor warranted to focus only on rot and weakness. Much needs to be done, but there is much to build upon. A rational observer would not choose the place of our enemies. The war in Lebanon, for starters, did change the status quo ante, and in some aspects, so far, for the better.... Meanwhile, the Iranian threat looms, but we are not alone in confronting it..... Though Iran is betting on Western division and self-doubt, the Iranian regime itself is riven itself by growing popular opposition. Its high stakes game raises the risks in case of Western failure, but also the potential benefits of victory. In this context, we need to keep in mind the resilience the Israeli people exhibited during the war, the bravery and commitment of our soldiers, and the value of what we have built over the past 59 years. This country must not measure itself solely by its leadership. Ultimately, it is the strength of the people and what we have achieved here that is enduring, and will prevail."

12. Mideast:

Summary:

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Perhaps the panic choking the Prime Minister's throat stems from the fact that Israel has never faced this situation: an Arab initiative, Arab mediators and an Arab vision of full and comprehensive peace, of rapprochement not only with confrontation states but also with history."

Stephanie Levy, research fellow at the Global Research in International Affairs Center at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "[The new French leadership's] challenge to France's historic pro-Arab policy could [even] lead to ... cooperating with the United States. When it comes to Middle East policy, there is a chance for a real French revolution."

Block Quotes:

11. "How Good It Is To Be Weak"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (4/22): "Perhaps the panic choking the Prime Minister's throat stems from the fact that Israel has never faced this situation: an Arab initiative, Arab mediators and an Arab vision of full and comprehensive peace, of rapprochement not only with confrontation states but also with history. These are all knocking at Israel's door, but nobody is home. Israel used to demand that Yasser Arafat 'speak Arabic,' the language of his public, as proof of the sincerity of his intentions. Now the time has come for the Israeli public to demand that Olmert 'speak Hebrew' and wholeheartedly declare: 'We call upon the Palestinian government and the government of Syria to negotiate with us on the basis of the Arab initiative, and we are prepared to pay the price,' and to say this himself and not via [Knesset Speaker] Dalia Itzik's handshake with Rania, the Queen of Jordan. But after all, he is a weak leader, and how mighty is his weakness and how sure of itself. Indeed, a commission of inquiry has never been established to investigate missed opportunities for peace."

II. "Preparing For a French Revolution in Mideast Policy"

Stephanie Levy, research fellow at the Global Research in

International Affairs Center at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (4/23): "Middle East policy has been the most important and controversial international issue in the hard-fought French presidential election campaign. And depending on the results, the vote could mark the first major change in that policy for three decades. Both Nicolas Sarkozy and Segolene Royal, the candidates of the center-right and the Socialists, respectively, have promised major shifts in France's stance on the Iranian, Lebanese, and Israeli-Palestinian issues if they win. They are reacting against the regime of outgoing President Jacques Chirac, who for 12 years -- following in the footsteps of predecessors back to Charles de Gaulle -- has allied the country with Arab dictators such as Yasser Arafat and Saddam Hussein. By making France the Arabs' favorite Western state, Chirac and other Gaullists have tried to create an alignment to counter the great -- and in France, much-despised -- primacy of the United States.... This challenge to France's historic pro-Arab policy could [even] lead to ... cooperating with the United States. When it comes to Middle East policy, there is a chance for a real French revolution."

13. Sudan: Darfur:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Israel, which came into being after the Holocaust cannot stand idly by in the face of the suffering of Darfur's refugees."

Block Quotes:

"Israeli Help For Darfur"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (4/22): "Israel should extend immediate assistance, whether funded by non-governmental agencies or directly, to refugees and displaced persons who have found shelter in Chad. The absence of diplomatic ties between the two countries should not be an obstacle. Israeli assistance to the victims of the tsunami in Indonesia, with which Israel also does not yet have full diplomatic ties, is an important example in this regard -- despite the differences in the nature of relations between the countries. In the past Israel has shown that it can provide much-needed aid to disaster areas throughout the world, demonstrating the Jewish values on which its establishment was based. Assistance to Muslim victims can illustrate much better than any international public relations campaign that the principles by which Israel was established are universal and do not discriminate between humans based on religion or race. Israel, which came into being after the Holocaust cannot stand idly by in the face of the suffering of Darfur's refugees."

JONES